

THE PAST,
THE PRESENT, AND THE FUTURE
OF THE
Medical Profession
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA;

BEING

A General Introductory

TO THE

COURSE OF LECTURES IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE

KENTUCKY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE,

DELIVERED BY

THOMAS D. MITCHELL, M.D.,

Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine,

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CORRESPONDENCE.

LOUISVILLE, Nov. 3d, 1852.

PROF. THOMAS D. MITCHELL:

DEAR SIR: In behalf of the Medical Class of the Kentucky School of Medicine, we respectfully solicit for publication, a copy of your introductory address delivered on the 2d instant.

Hoping our request may meet your approbation, we remain,

Your obedient servants,

Wm. Hughs, Ky..

A. B. Cook, Pa.,

John Sutton, Tenn.,

Andrew Lemon, Ind.,

T. M. Abernathy, N. C.,

J. L. Ross, Mo.

H. M. Prothro, S. C.,

E. H. LUCKETT, Pres't.

W. J. CARDWELL, Sec'y.

ORMSBY HOUSE, Nov. 6th, 1852.

GENTLEMEN:

I respond to your polite note of the 3d instant, by placing in the hands of the Chairman of your Committee, a copy of the lecture referred to. Be pleased to accept, for yourselves, individually, as well as for the Class whom you represent, my most hearty wishes for your health and prosperity.

I am, gentlemen, very respectfully yours. &c.,

THOS. D. MITCHELL.

Messrs. Lockett,	Cardwell,
Hughs,	Sutton,
Abernathy,	Prothro,
Cook,	Lemon,
Ross.	

LECTURE.

THE crowning paradox of earth, is man. Filled to overflowing with inconsistencies and contradictions, he presents a more than chameleon variety of shades, and yet glories in the identity and perfection of his moral, mental and physical nature. Now elated to the stars, and anon sunk almost out of the ken of vision—to-day on the verge of a terrible explosion, by reason of intense excitement, but to-morrow courting seclusion, quietude, repose—what is he less than an enigma even to himself? How many millions of human minds have been agitated and convulsed to the farthest limit of endurance by the high-pressure excitement of the political tornado that has this day swept the land from Maine to California! Diffused over the almost illimitable tract that separates the new world of the Pacific from the ancient steady habit region of the Puritans, operating on all grades of mind and on all phases of character, it might have been imagined that the fury of the storm would have left behind it the lasting impress of its wrath, ineffacable by time. Not so, however, with happy, thrice happy America. The sparkling eyes and the beaming countenances before me to-night, are most eloquently annihilating such an inference. If the terrific lightnings and thunders of the tempest have shot their lurid flashes and sent their angry roar athwart the region beyond the eastern slope of the Alleghanies, the trumpet voice of the storm-king has been heard here also; and yet, how promptly has the high political fever subsided at the gentle bidding of reason, common sense, or the higher guidance of religious sentiment.

The great question that has upheaved this whole nation for months, has this day been settled forever. And whether Scott or Pierce shall hold the mighty helm of State, it is *our* country still, great in its glory and glorious in its greatness, over which the one or the other is to preside. And although our Calhouns, and our Clays, and our Websters, go down to the grave, the God of Washington and my country cannot die. In the full assurance of a doctrine so cheering to the heart, allow me, for a short season, to divert the current of thought from the turmoil of politics to the more congenial theme of medicine.

THE past, the present, and the future, of medical science in the United States of America, is the theme for contempla-

tion in the present hour. To a bird's-eye view of this vast subject, your attention is respectfully invited. Its details are too copious to allow of more than a glance at the surface, during the brief period allotted to us, on such an occasion.

The designations of past, present, and future, demand a passing explanation. It suits our purpose best, to assign to the first, and also to the second, the term of forty years, allowing to the third, any scope that its own nature may indicate. Although it be a matter of history, that the public medical tuition of our country goes back to the year 1765, as its starting point, it is equally certain that the war of the revolution induced so large a chasm, as to contract the interval from that era to 1813, to the period of forty years, as already named. We are, therefore, quite safe in affirming, that, prior to the year 1813, there were not more than forty operative years devoted to the public training of young men for the profession of medicine. From the year 1813 to 1853, we have another period of like duration, unbroken by any contingency. And as each of these periods in the history of American medicine, has marked peculiarities that may well claim our study, it will be a chief aim of the present address, to exhibit those peculiarities in such an aspect as to augment your respect for the profession of your choice, and to inspire you with the laudable ambition of winning its highest and most enduring honors.

How small were the beginnings of the early history of American Medicine! with what difficulties had it to contend! When we ponder the facts of the case, our astonishment is not, that the tender plant did not sooner swell its dimensions to the capacity and majesty of the giant of the forest, but rather that it had vitality enough to insure a certain and abiding growth. Stunted, as it was indeed, by the paralyzing influence of a protracted war, its fresh budding into active life, when the storm was over and gone, proved nothing so certainly as the undying viability of a germ, animated by the same sort of deathless ardor, that in the end gave victory to our arms. The same omnipotent energy that buoyed our father's hopes, high above the angry flood that threatened their destruction, stimulated the great men of our profession, in the days of its extremest feebleness, to look ahead, and spy out a glorious future in the distance.

A little particle of rain,
That from a passing cloud descended,
Was heard thus idly to complain.
" My brief existence now is ended.
Outcast, alike, of earth and sky,
Useless to live, unknown to die "
That little drop is now a gem.
Fit for the world's proud diadem.

The contentions of our early professional history, operated most disastrously, by procrastinating the desired results, at which all good men were aiming. There were parties, even then, arrayed against each other, and that too, when the united effort of the whole profession was imperiously demanded. Add to all this, the difficulty of procuring the right kind of materials for the work of instruction, as well as the necessary instruments, apparatus, &c. &c., and a suitable place for conducting the operations of a medical school. Our country was in its infancy, and her institutions could claim scarcely more than embryotic vigor. Her educated physicians were very few, and far between, and only one, here and there, of the little band, seemed to be fitted to the responsible task of teaching the science of medicine. Who can fail to perceive, under such a state of things, how likely some of those selected to teach, would prove deficient in the qualities essential to such a service? In truth, we have often wondered that the early efforts to establish medical faculties in the city of Philadelphia, were not a thousand fold more unsuccessful, than the issue proved them to have been. Well may our hearts beat high, and our bosoms swell with all that is pure in patriotism, when we recollect that *Bond*, and *Kuben*, and *Shippen*, and *Rush*, and *Physick*, and *Wistar*, were not only able teachers, but American physicians. Of some of these worthies, we know nothing more than their names and their history. But we did know *Rush*, and *Physick*, and *Wistar*, and we have yet to hear of any school in this country, or in the wide world, that has ever enjoyed the instruction of a nobler trio. Their names have gone out on the wings of the wind to every clime, and their influence is felt and acknowledged in all civilized lands. These men were the glory and the pride of our profession, not only in the first forty years of its remarkable history, but they are to be its chief glory to the end of time.

Few, in the present day, are prepared to form a just estimate of the value of the labors of the great luminaries of American medicine, whose names have been repeated on this occasion. It is needful to know something of the disadvantageous circumstances that for many years environed them, and which might have almost paralysed the efforts of other men. Had they such ample edifices for the accommodation of their classes and themselves as we enjoy, or were their means in this respect even suited to the smallness of the audiences that listened to their instructions? Far otherwise. So late as the year 1800, the lectures of the University of Pennsylvania were given in several distant places in the city of Philadelphia, some of which were difficult of access, by reason of the want of paved footways. For a series of years,

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the anatomical lectures and dissections were carried on, in a cramped, unsightly house, where nothing presented to encourage the student, but the indomitable ardor of his teachers.

But there were other defects incident to the early history of the profession in America, and these were palpable in other places besides Philadelphia. There was a scarcity of books, and an entire absence of diagrams, and plates, and models, all of which are now in common use, and deemed essentially necessary, as appurtenances of medical schools. We are aware that in respect of the defects adverted to, signal changes for the better were realized, prior to the year 1813; yet these were few and small, contrasted with the appliances put in requisition subsequently.

In addition to the statement made, it is perfectly fair to say, that during nearly the entire term of forty years prior to 1813, there were only five professors in the University of Pennsylvania, while in the schools, the number was even less. It must be obvious to all reflecting minds, that if five teachers faithfully discharge the entire duties of a faculty, their task must have been one of real professional labor. They worked industriously and perseveringly, and hence their success. Their term of collegiate service was four months, and the whole period was made subservient to the grand design. Pupils were more regular in attendance all the while, from the first to the last day of the course, during the forty years now under review, than at any subsequent period. Then the lectures in Philadelphia began at nine in the morning and continued until two o'clock; and at three in the afternoon, there was a renewal of the exercises. I very well remember that Rush and Wistar, in addition to their stated lectures, gave one gratuitous hour, daily, during nearly the whole of February.

But you will be disposed to inquire, what were the fruits of all the disadvantageous circumstances herein detailed? Those of you who have read the early history of our profession, are aware, that the classes and graduates were very tardily increased. The graduation of ten young men in 1768, we may presume, induced the fond expectation that a still larger number would be sent forth in the years immediately following. But all such anticipations were doomed to reiterated disappointment. The average yearly number of graduates from 1768 to 1798, was a fraction less than five, falling as low as to four, three, two, and one. Who, but the very men selected by a wise Providence for such an emergency, could have triumphed over such defeat? Down to the close of the session of 1812-13, there were only seven hundred and three graduates in the University of Pennsylvania, making an average of less than eighteen for each year. We have

but to contrast this result with the graduations in the same school, in the subsequent forty years, to learn a little of the discouragements that met the pioneers of medical education in America. From 1813 to 1853, the number of graduates may be fairly set down, as at least five thousand, or one hundred and twenty-five for each year.

Let us for a moment look at some of the practical results of the first period of forty years, in respect of medical teaching, and I think it will appear, despite of all the defects and disadvantages of that epoch, that in no period of our history, have the fruits been more honorable to teachers. Nearly thirty of those who graduated prior to 1813, were selected to teach in the schools that have sprung up in our land, and many of them are yet engaged in this occupation. We have only to name a few of the persons alluded to, in order to assure you that they were the right kind of pupils, not only, but also, that the teaching of the first forty years in the University of Pennsylvania, was of the very best grade. *Charles Caldwell, Walter Channing, Nathaniel Chapman, John Esten Cooke, Elisha DeButts, William P. Dewees, John Syng Dorsey, Benjamin Winslow Dudley, John Eberle, Geo. Hayward, Samuel Jackson, James Moultrie, Reuben D. Mussey, Daniel Oliver, Nathaniel Potter, James Woodhouse*, are names that next to *Rush*, and *Physick*, and *Wistar*, have exerted an influence on the American and professional mind, unexcelled by any other sixteen graduates of any period in our history. To the latest generation, the student of medicine may proudly place his finger on this galaxy, and exclaim, "these are among my country's jewels." The broad world over, the writings of *Caldwell*, and *Channing*, and *Chapman*, and *Dewees*, and *Dorsey*, and *Dudley*, and *Eberle*, and *Jackson*, and *Oliver*, and *Potter*, are read and appreciated, because they deserve to be.

Some of the names here recorded, were pupils in Philadelphia, when the advantages of a medical school were so exceedingly limited by circumstances already hinted at, as to demand double, or even treble the efforts that pupils have now to put forth, and this fact may account for their exalted reputation. They were not the men to be appalled by inconvenience or embarrassment. A high and commanding purpose stimulated them, and hills were leveled, and valleys elevated, at their bidding. If they lacked text books, and the hundred appliances that have since rendered the study of medicine an easy task, they studied the more. If art failed to lend its illuminating influence, nature was investigated with incessant vigilance. The powers of the mind were developed, invigorated, matured by the difficulties that filled the pathway of the student, and hence his enduring success.

To all this must be added a fact that should be pondered seriously by every future aspirant for esculapian honors; we mean the very common custom, forty years ago, of studying medicine three or four years, under the care of a respectable practitioner, and of attending three full courses of lectures. This protracted reading and hearing could hardly fail to imbue the entire mind of an intelligent man, with all the valuable principles of medical science, and so to lay the foundation of substantial and enduring excellence.

The scarcity of books has been alluded to, as part of the history of the first forty years of our medical schools, and it is an item of considerable importance. The young man who can now make his election between *Wistar*, and *Horner*, and *Pancoast*, and *Quain*, and *Wilson* and a dozen more authors of treatises on *Anatomy*, may be a little amazed, perhaps, to learn that *Fyfe's duodecimo* and *Cheselden* were the only works at hand on this topic, forty or fifty years ago. It will be strange news to him, to hear that the speaker procured the first edition of *Wistar's Anatomy*, (the earliest American work on that subject,) in numbers of fifty pages, and that something like a year had transpired before the whole was issued from the press; so that the subscribers, at five dollars in advance, who were not exceedingly careful of their numbers, had soiled and defective volumes at last. In this very scarcity of books, however, was an obvious advantage. Instead of flying from one author to another, and then to a third, a fourth, or a fifth, to study *Anatomy*, we fastened on *Fyfe*, or on *Wistar*, and we read them carefully, and so read as to understand. Besides all this, be it remembered, that the student of *Anatomy* was not a proxy dissector, in those days. With *Fyfe* or *Wistar* in one hand, and his scalpel in the other, he went to work like one determined to know all that could be learned by patient investigation. Not content with looking on at others who were dissecting, and at the same time comparing their explorations with their text book, he was the industrious operative, who was sure of his reward, because he relied mainly on his own energies.

Far be it from our purpose, to find fault with the multiplication of good books on any topic. Yet, we have witnessed the tendency of the human mind to be satisfied with a mere glance at many volumes on the same topic, rather than study with diligence, the contents of a single book, and the result has generally proved to be undesirable. Men thus learn to be satisfied with the superficialities, and give themselves little concern about the deep, abstruse realities of science. Thus it was not with the giants of our profession who grew up under the auspices of *Shippen*, and *Rush*, and *Physick*, and *Wistar*.

Perhaps it will not be inappropriate to allude, as we pass,

to the extreme paucity of the anatomical preparations of the museum, and the mere show of chemical apparatus of former times. Wistar and Woodhouse taught Anatomy and Chemistry with unsurpassed ability and success, with a smaller amount of appliances suited to their departments, than you may see in the most recent schools of our country, whose pecuniary means are too deficient to justify a rapid augmentation. The late Judge Cooper, of Pennsylvania, afterwards President of South Carolina College, taught Chemistry in Philadelphia more ably, with an apparatus that would not twice fill a wheel-barrow, than some of later times, whose surplus articles would more than load a dozen drays. All the extrinsic appliances on earth, will not, can not constitute a genuine teacher. If the Professor be the man he should be, his reliance will be less, infinitely less, on lecture-room appendages, than on his own inherent powers of development and research. One of the most turbid teachers of Chemistry this country has ever produced, was literally crowded in the spacious apartments allotted to him, by the absolute profusion of glittering utensils, while some of the most lucid and useful instructors in America, were so stinted in apparatus, that a first course pupil might be tempted to infer, that they were not competent to teach.

There is yet another item in the early history of American medicine, that seems to be worthy of notice in this place. Our allusion is to the undeniable fact, that there was then a purer, more rational, and more available sort of chemical medicine in fashion, than that which has been more recently a candidate for patronage. Students, resident in rural districts, were in the habit of seeing, and even taking charge of many cases that could not be regularly attended by their preceptors, and so a large amount of practical skill was acquired. In city and town locations, hospitals and dispensaries were frequented for the purpose of inspecting disease in its true character, and watching the result of treatment, and in this way, the industrious student made acquisitions of unspeakable value. In thus applauding the clinics of olden time, we do not intend to denounce, by wholesale, the modern contrivances of colleges, in virtue of which, all sorts of cases, small, and not quite so small, are brought up for public exhibition, first in the amphitheatre, and then in the college periodical. That the college *clinic* (as it is styled) may be of some service to an inquiring student, we do not deny, while we most positively affirm, that, in our judgment, the hospital and dispensary attendance were far more profitable. The patients there inspected, were more like those to be seen in after life, and the whole display, if display it could be call-

ed, was far more in accord with nature, than very much of the detail that finds its way into a modern college clinic.

Belonging, as he does, to the first period of forty years in our professional history, the speaker feels justified in thus speaking out, for what he has ever regarded as the palmy era of American medicine. His partiality for the teachers, and for many of the taught of those days, will, he hopes, be excused, if a foible at all, as one of those commendable frailties of our nature, that is not likely to harm any one, save him who cherishes it.

To all that has been advanced, to account for the excellence of much of the first fruits of American medical education, we may append the conceded fact, that those who were intended for the profession of medicine, fifty or sixty years ago, were, for the most part, substantially educated in English literature, and not unfrequently in the Latin language. Thus a good foundation was secured, upon which might be erected an enduring and useful superstructure.

The most serious and effective agency in the deterioration of the medical profession, had scarcely a beginning prior to 1813, its pernicious workings having been reserved for the subsequent forty years of our history. We need hardly to announce the character of this deleterious agency, as every one who is conversant with the facts, will readily understand our allusion to be, to the rapid multiplication of the schools, and the consequent laxity in collegiate discipline, and in private teaching.

When we entered on the study of medicine, such a thing as a medical school was not in being, in all the great West. It is true that vast domain was then but in the incipency of settlement, and no one dreamt even of the mighty tide of emigration, that was so soon to convert its hundreds into millions. But who can wonder that some of the adventurers from Kentucky, who traveled on horseback to Philadelphia in 1805, to enjoy the advantages of the parent school of medicine, should have cherished the fond hope at that early day, of establishing a western school for the convenience of the sons of the forest land? Dudley, and Richardson, and Overton, and others who were among the early pupils of the West in Philadelphia, had, no doubt, often mooted this very question, in the temporary exile from their own firesides, and longed for the day when the openings of Providence, might prepare the way for the realization of an object so dear to their hearts. They well knew that very many young men of talents were deterred from following their example, by all the difficulties peculiar to a new country, and the perils that environed so long and lonely a journey. Men were not then transferred from place to place, a thousand miles apart, by

electricity or steam, in a few hours. To avoid the dread encounter of the red man, the pioneers of civilization, who ventured to make a journey of six weeks along foot paths, beaten out by savage feet, were compelled to congregate at given points, then known as *stations*, whence they took up the line of march in company.

In view of facts like these, which are by no means tinged by fancy, who wonders that so many men of undoubted talent should have settled in the West, as practitioners of medicine, with no other qualifications than could be furnished in the office of a faithful preceptor, possessed of a very meager library? Some of the most successful physicians I have ever known, were dependent on no other agency than that adverted to, backed by their own indomitable assiduity, for all the character they ever acquired as members of the medical profession. To use their own phraseology, "their backs had never rubbed a college wall," for their circumstances, and the state of the country utterly annihilated every germ of a hope, that one day or other, their ears might be saluted by the voice of professional instruction, in the far off city of brotherly love.

Scores of physicians, of the grade we have ventured to describe, were busily engaged in the truly arduous duties of professional life, for many years anterior to the establishment of the first medical school in the West. I am well aware that several abortive efforts were made, from time to time, by the governing powers of Transylvania University, to convert the aspirations of the fathers of western medicine, into a tangible reality. Their printed records show, that *Samuel Brown, M. D.*, was appointed Professor of Theory and Practice, and of Chemistry, in 1799. But that did not constitute a faculty, nor establish a medical school. The next appointment, viz., of the Rev. James Fishback, to the chair of Theory and Practice, in 1805, was alike unavailing. Brown had graduated in Edinburgh, and Fishback had been a faithful pupil in Philadelphia; but what could they accomplish, in a new country, alone? I knew them both, and doubt not their capability, with suitable associates, to have conducted a medical school with credit and success. Their resignation in 1806, was indicated by common sense, and excited no surprise. In the same year, the Emeritus Professor of Surgery and Anatomy, of the Kentucky school of medicine, received his degree of Doctor of Medicine in Philadelphia, and in 1809 the same degree was awarded to James Overton, of Kentucky. These gentlemen, in connexion with Joseph Buchanan, and Elisha Warfield, were constituted a faculty, with obvious imperfections, in the year 1809. Unapprized, as we are, with all the facts as they could then have been de-

veloped, we have no hesitation to affirm, that this effort was deemed the very best that could then have been made, and it serves to indicate the unabated purpose of former years, to establish a good school of medicine. far away in the region of the woods. For the information of the junior portion of this audience, who have not had access to the records, we present the actual constitution of the faculty of 1809, in Lexington, Kentucky.

Benjamin Winston Dudley, M. D., Anatomy and Surgery.

Joseph Buchanan, A. M., Institutes of Medicine.

James Overton, M. D., Theory and Practice.

Elisha Warfield, Surgery and Obstetrics.

There are several points worthy of remark in this composition of the first western medical faculty. We are not in possession of any data, to assure us certainly, that these gentlemen ever officiated as a faculty. The pamphlet from which we quote, was published in 1826, and gives the year of appointment, and the year of resignation, of the several professors in the various departments of the University, with the exception of those who continued after the issue of this document. Of the four Professors of 1809, the first continued until 1850, the second withdrew in 1810, the third in 1818, and the fourth in 1809. The fair, and perhaps necessary inference from these facts is, that these gentlemen did not give instruction as a medical faculty, and that those who held over, did so in the expectation of being assisted by others in consummating a desideratum as fondly cherished by many, who were only spectators of what seemed to be idle efforts to secure an unattainable object.

It merits notice, also, that the faculty of 1809 made no provision for *Materia Medica*, nor Chemistry, while it is even more remarkable, that it established, as far as an appointment could operate, a professorship of the Institutes of Medicine. That this was the *first attempt in the United States of America, to incorporate the Institutes with the other departments of medicine*, is thus a matter of history, that cannot be gainsayed. The gentleman selected for this important post, was not a graduate in medicine, but simply a Master of Arts, and we feel at liberty to make the inference, that he and his colleague Dr. Warfield, had been pupils in the parent school for one session, but did not persevere so far as to obtain the diploma of the University. We do not entertain a doubt, that this imperfect faculty could have given a full and very instructive course of lectures, since it is more than probable that the departments unprovided for, could have been temporarily filled, as has often been done in later times, under similar circumstances. It would seem that nothing was want-

ing, save a suitable provision for the chairs of *Materia Medica* and Chemistry, to have made the infant school of Lexington in 1809, more perfect in its organization, than even the parent school in Philadelphia, which lacked a chair of obstetrics, and had no separate provision for the Institutes of Medicine, when I was one of its pupils.

Some may be disposed to express surprise, that while these imperfect developements were evolved in Lexington, without a realization of the end in view, other regions in the West did not take the hint and plant a well arranged medical school in some suitable locality, where western young men might enjoy all the advantages to be found in Philadelphia. But it must be borne in mind, that more individuals, and especially more men of talent and enterprize had been sent from Kentucky to be educated at the parent school, than had been furnished from any other State west of the mountains. These gentlemen returned to their homes, burning with a commendable zeal to give to their countrymen all the truly valuable helps that an eastern school could furnish, to fit the student for an active and honorable professional life. Having been personally conversant for eight months with the actual workings of a school of medicine, they might presume to be able to establish, successfully, a similar institution in Kentucky, and hence their failure, even for a long period, did not provoke others, less likely to succeed, to make an experiment elsewhere.

The demand for a Western school did not cease because of reiterated defeats in attempts to plant one of the right stamp. The journey to Philadelphia was as costly, hazardous and protracted as ever, nor was there any prospect of improvement in these respects. Hence it happened that, in 1815, another effort was put forth by the selection of Coleman Rogers and William Hall Richardson, to fill important places in the projected school. In 1816, the Chair of *Materia Medica* was filled for the first time, and in 1817, the Chair of Chemistry was in like manner provided for. In 1818, the first degree of Doctor of Medicine ever conferred in a western school was given to John Lawson McCullough, of Lexington, the only graduate on that occasion.

The written records of the proceedings of the medical department of Transylvania University, do not furnish any account of the faculty organization, prior to the year 1819, from which date the register, with a few exceptions, is apparently complete. The faculty then consisted of Professors Dudley, Brown, Richardson, Caldwell, and Blythe, by whom a full course was given on all the departments.

From this period, the desire to multiply schools of medicine, was evinced in various sections of our country, and I

need not tell you, how abundantly that desire has been gratified. It is not for me to censure nor to laud the feelings that prompted to this result; but it is impossible to resist the conviction, that the augmentation of numbers has not been met by a corresponding improvement in the science, or profession of medicine. The phrenzy of competition has been disastrous not a little, to the steady and permanent growth of the profession, in all that appertains to its true dignity and value.

It is worthy of remark, that the early, and even part of its more advanced history, found the school of Lexington very deficient in what we now hold to be essential appliances, in the management of a school. The gentlemen who filled the professorships, were practical, working teachers, and pupils were taught to think for themselves. Hence the notorious fact, that this first western school, like its eastern prototype, has sent forth a goodly number of able men, to fill the posts of public teachers in kindred institutions.

This is a proper time to speak of a rule, first established by the school of Lexington, and adopted by all the institutions that have succeeded it in the West, and which, for a time, was denounced in the East, as calculated to work professional deterioration. We refer to the provision, in virtue of which gentlemen who had been engaged in reputable practice for at least four years, were permitted to be candidates for graduation, after attendance of one full course of lectures. We have ever regarded this as a wise and necessary arrangement, and one whose practical operation has rarely been discreditable to the profession. It was denounced by the eastern faculties, as unfair in respect of older institutions, whose laws required attendance of two full courses of lectures, as preliminary to offering for a degree. It was even averred, that the western device was intended as a decoy, and was therefore disreputable.

A very brief analysis of this problem, will, we doubt not, place the matter in its true light. The peculiar circumstances of the whole west, then a new region in the common parlance of the day, rendered the rule in question, a necessary provision. It was notorious that many very respectable physicians were scattered abroad in Kentucky, and the neighboring States, whose circumstances had utterly prevented attendance on the lectures in Philadelphia, then the only school of medicine, and who had never heard a medical lecture any where. These individuals were men of reading, reflection, and study, and had turned the advantages actually possessed to the best practicable account. The faculty of the Lexington school, aware that this state of things had not been met by any suitable expedient in the East, determined to fill an obvious chasm, by the adoption of this rule. The candidate

was required to present proof, satisfactory, that he had been a respectable practitioner of medicine during the term of four years, having previously studied medicine under the guidance of a regular member of the profession. To expect such persons to abandon a lucrative practice in two successive winters, or in two winters with an interval more protracted, was too utopian for actual experiment. Had such a plan been adopted on paper, it could not have been carried out to any considerable extent, and many, who, under the rule as enacted, became respectable graduates, would have remained as irregular practitioners to the day of their death. This consideration, alone, was too important to be overlooked, in the decision of the case.

But it is well to look at the actual operation of the rule. What kind of pupils came to the school, under this novel provision? Were they the rash, the giddy, the thoughtless, the immature persons who sometimes find a place in medical classes? On the contrary, they were men who had by daily intercourse with all grades of society for several years, acquired a common sense character, a steadiness of purpose, a talent of concentration, fitting them for rapid improvement by the daily culture of a well organized school. They knew the value of time too well to trifle with it, and they had families at remote points, who, sighing for their return, would expect from them a fixed devotion to the object that had led to a temporary expatriation. And as a general rule, it has turned out, that these men of one course of lectures, have almost invariably passed the most satisfactory examinations, for the degree of Doctor of Medicine, and have ultimately become valuable members of the profession.

At the present day, when almost every State in the Union has its medical school, and when in some of them, we may count at least half a dozen institutions devoted to the work of making doctors, there is far less propriety in retaining the rule of which we have been speaking, than there was in its first enactment. Then, it was devised because of the scarcity of medical schools, and the difficulties that beset the path of him who sighed for the doctorate. But now that these institutions are so easy of access, it is the opinion of many judicious men, that it is hardly necessary to retain the regulation on our medical statute books. Most assuredly, the schools of Philadelphia, where the rule is just as fashionable as it ever was in the West, can present no valid reason for perpetuating it. They graduate practitioners of four years' standing, after attending one course of lectures, knowing that the pupils go from places in the West, not twenty miles from well known schools of medicine, where they could

have attended a course of lectures with far less sacrifice, than is incurred by a resort to an eastern institution.

Twenty-one years have rolled away, since the speaker gave his first introductory lecture in the West. At that moment, the entire country on this side of the Alleghanies, and south of Mason and Dixon's line, contained only five regular schools of medicine, and two of that number were exceedingly feeble. How many, think you, have been added to the list, in four years less than a quarter century? Were you to make twenty the maximum of your conjecture, there would be a surplus whose exact numerical force, cannot now be given with certainty. The territory, of which mention has been made, has gained (if it be a gain) at least one medical school for every year since 1831. In this estimate, we do not include the Eclectic, Botanical, Thompsonian, and Infinitesimal things that now dot this great valley, only one of which had even a nominal existence, twenty-one years ago. We are quite willing that any of the Malthusians in this respectable company shall take our place, in calculating the pertinent question, "has the supply been equal to the demand?"

We have thus surveyed, in a somewhat discursive manner, the past history of the profession in these United States, and we come next to inquire, what are the peculiarities of the passing period. The whole of this era, according to a previous intimation, extends from 1813 to 1853, but as we have somewhat entrenched on its boundaries in the preceding remarks, we shall confine our observations mainly to the last ten or fifteen years, including, of course, the present time.

Let us make a flying survey of this portion of the professional field, and spy out, if we can, its leading peculiarities. These are—

- 1st. A rabid propensity to multiply medical schools.
- 2d. Devices of various kinds to decoy pupils; such as tickets at a reduced price, with long credit in place of cash, low priced boarding, accommodation as to attendance of the lectures, and a guarantee of the diploma.
- 3d. Very general disuse of the ancient practice of training students at their homes, in the offices of preceptors.
- 4th. Annual conventions for the ostensible purpose of elevating the profession, the chief managers of which, feel it to be quite legitimate, to denounce the schools, for not prolonging their sessions to six months, and for refusing to relinquish the examination of candidates for the doctorate, while it is notorious, that very many of the complainants are incompetent to conduct such an examination.

It is not our present purpose to speak particularly of the first and second of the peculiarities just stated, for the very obvious reason, that in some parts of the country they have

been matters of public notoriety for many years, and will scarcely be controverted. The third and fourth items are too important to be disposed of in the same summary way, and we design to be somewhat explicit in respect of both. Neither of these is invested with the charm of novelty, the third being in our judgment the most deleterious of all the pernicious agencies that are now at work in the profession, and although of mature age, waxing worse as it advances in years.

The almost total neglect of office examinations may be fairly stated, as a marked peculiarity of the present period. That it came into fashion after the year 1813, is, if I mistake not, a fact that needs no special proofs. There are those now living, who well remember the regularity with which they were examined by their private preceptors, forty or fifty years ago, and they can hardly forget the happy fruits of the exercise. It seemed to be just as necessary a preventive of mental apathy on medical topics, as is motion of the body to guard against a general torpor of the muscular system. Yet in very many regions where pupils abound, such a thing as a catechetical examination has not been known for years. Indeed, the student would be alarmed, if his (so called) preceptor ventured to interrogate him in respect of any medical topic, saving the compounding of a prescription, or the answering calls for the doctor, or something of that sort, which an intelligent servant could do quite as well. I have heard medical pupils, almost without number, affirm that they were never so interrogated during the entire period of pupilage. It seemed to be quite enough, by way of preparation for attending lectures somewhere, to have been called a student of medicine, to have looked at a few medicines on the shelf, and to have glanced at a medical dictionary, or some old and imperfect work on practical medicine.

As a part of this system of neglect, we name the utter recklessness of the profession, in respect of the mental, moral, educational, and other qualities of young men, who desired to be regarded as students of medicine. As daily or weekly examinations ceased to constitute a part of the training, it soon came to be equally unimportant whether the pupils could write the English language correctly, or comprehend works of the profession, if ready for their perusal. Of no importance was it to ascertain the peculiar bias of the mind, the probability of adaptedness to the calling of the practitioner, since it was presumed that all this, and much more, fell within the special province of the medical faculty, to whose care the pupil was destined to be committed. If a young man of known immorality of character, including profanity, falsehood, and intemperance, offered at the private

office, the heavy purse of his father more than outweighed all these palpable defects, which should at once have barred the door effectually against admission.

Do any inquire why physicians were willing to receive pupils, without proper investigation as to character and qualification, and very often without a fee? We reply, that the number of students in an office has been made the measure of the doctor's practice, and thus every new hand in the shop was expected to add to the calls for medical aid. To such an extent has this delinquency been carried, that the evil seems to be without remedy. Having brought the profession to such a low condition by their own fault, these men turn round very deliberately, and charge the entire degradation on the laxity and incompetence of the medical professors. And I verily believe if the facts could now be spread out shorn of disguise, that it would appear, that a very large proportion of those who clamor the loudest about professional deterioration, would prove to have been among the most delinquent in the selection and training of their own office-pupils. That there are many honorable exceptions, I well know, but much do I fear that the truth is to be found just where I have attempted to locate it, in respect of the majority.

The fourth peculiarity of the present era came as a sort of expedient, that many supposed to be indispensable, and well calculated to remedy existing evils, if remedy were possible. We allude to conventions of physicians from every part of the United States, to be held annually in different places, for the avowed purpose of elevating the profession. Nor do we doubt that some who have embarked most heartily in this enterprise, have been moved by the best motives. Far be it from us to think otherwise. Yet there are too many living facts on record, to permit us for a moment to doubt, that very many of the primary agitators were governed by the most selfish considerations, not the least of which was a marked propensity to exonerate themselves from blame, and to criminate others who have demeaned themselves far more honorably in respect of the great professional interests with which they are identified.

Never have we doubted that well organized medical associations, and even great national conventions may have their uses. They serve to revive the most pleasant associations of early life, and to bind the brotherhood together in the bonds of a professional affection that should ever be cherished. And were it not, that in every great family, there are some cynical country cousins, whose repellencies forever antagonize a result so auspicious, we might hope to realize, as one of the fruits of those annual convocations, that cordiality and unity which led a spectator of the smiling crowd at the

late supper of the State Medical Society of Kentucky to exclaim, "behold how these brethren love one another!" But, unity and cordiality, however desirable, cannot accomplish a thorough medical reformation, nor is it possible for this work to be effected by the labors of societies or conventions, unless the efforts be directed *mainly* to the characters and qualifications of *students*. Old trees are seldom, if ever improved, while scions, and especially good scions may be so grafted as to yield the best kind of fruit. We do not hope to erect a lasting pyramid, by placing the apex down and the base up; nor can we reform our profession by any code of rules to straighten old and crooked sticks, but rather by moulding the pliant twig *aright*, and teaching the young idea *how* to shoot.

We have scanned the operations of some of the associations and conventions referred to, with not a little interest, and, as the result of our scrutiny have been pained to find, that the mammoth evil in the way of the restoration of lost dignity, has been comparatively untouched, while the far less momentous topics of prolonging the sessions of the schools and the ordeal of final examination for degrees have been prodigiously magnified, until what was at all natural about them, has been invested with some of the worst attributes of monstrosity. On another occasion, we dwelt at some length on this topic, and do not feel disposed now to enter into details. Suffice it to say, that multiplied as the schools have been, and palpable as the defects of some of them are, the remedy is not to be found in prolonged sessions, nor in a radical change in the examination of candidates, but in a return to the ancient habits in respect of scrutinizing the character and qualifications of young men, for the place of office pupil, and the daily or tri-weekly examinations in order to ascertain the amount of progress in the studies assigned. Often have we affirmed, as we now do with all sincerity, that the private preceptors of this country hold the destiny of the profession in their own hands. Let them reject every unfit or unworthy young man who sighs to be a student of medicine; let them carefully direct the studies of those actually under their supervision, examining them as frequently as circumstances will allow, and they will furnish the schools with the best material that professors can desire, and the final products will be honorable to the private, as well as to the public instructors.

We desire to be informed in what way six months' sessions can improve the profession, apart from the rectification of the errors first noticed in respect of private tuition. Does any sane man really believe, that attendance on lectures during the entire year, if it were possible to enforce a requisition to that effect, could compensate for the reckless neglect

to which allusion has been made, in relation to the selection and training of pupils? Is it practicable, by any extent of attendance on medical lectures in the best school in the world, even to seven lectures per day, for seven years, to infuse intelligence, energy, and discrimination into a youth, however amiable, who is semi-demented by nature, and in whose behalf the most untiring and well-directed efforts have been unavailing? No one can reach such a conclusion, without the previous act of self-stultification. The tree must be of the right kind, or you will look in vain for the right kind of fruit. Men do not gather figs from thistle bushes now, any more than they did in times of yore, and they never will, plainly, because it is impossible. Let the young men who enter our offices, be good men and true, intelligent, energetic, well educated, moral, conscientious, and a guarantee need not be demanded, that the schools will send out intelligent, upright, competent physicians. In no operation of nature or art, is there a more manifest relation between cause and effect, than in the *right training* of the *right kind* of medical pupils, and the *ultimate results*.

We are told that the custom of some of the schools with sessions of four months, and seven lectures per day, did violence to the human constitution, and ought not to be tolerated. But having had nearly twelve years experience, under precisely such a state of things, we feel at liberty to speak out in its defence. We hazard nothing in the affirmation, that scores of the ablest and most distinguished living physicians of Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, and the entire South, were trained in Transylvania University, under this very state of things, insufferable and ruinous as some have proclaimed it to be. And if it be alleged that discoveries in science have enlarged the domain of teaching, so as to render a four months' session too brief, let me say, for I can do it most truthfully, that a wise expurgation of things, obsolete, and of no value, would make ample room for all the new things that are true in every department of medical science. If medical lectures were so revised from year to year, as to eject all the stereotyped nonsense that has no sort of claim, save its antiquity, there would be time enough for a properly condensed, yet lucid presentation of all truly valuable discoveries, in such sessions as I have had the temerity thus to defend.

It is just to the profession at large, to state here, as I now do emphatically, that the only attempt to carry out the recommendation for a six months' session, has been a failure. This position will, doubtless, be gainsayed, by those whose interests may seem to prompt that way; yet I know it to be a verity, and they know it also. Let us look at the facts. In the city of Philadelphia where an honest effort was made

to accomplish this innovation fully, pupils have been received without a demurrer, who did not reach the city until five, six, or more weeks had elapsed after the week of introductories. These delinquents were matriculated just as though they had entered on the first day of the session. In addition to this well known fact, it is equally notorious, that at least one third (and some say one-half) of the class finds it convenient to bid adieu to the school, when their friends connected with the other medical institutions are about to depart. As this event occurs at the close of February, or in the first week of March, it is plain that, excepting the candidates who must of necessity remain, the throng has dwindled to a handful, whereby, nearly a month of the session is lost. The delinquents in the opening of the session, are usually second course pupils, while those who leave late in February, are in attendance for the first time. Could we reach a just average of loss thus actually sustained by both grades of pupils, it would be seen, that at least one-third of the entire class, fails to enjoy the advantages of a term exceeding four months. And if we contrast the University of 1852 with the same University of 1812, it will appear, beyond all controversy, that the boasted improvement of a prolonged session, is not even a nominal gain, in point of time.

In 1812, the lectures opened at nine in the forenoon, and held on till two. After the dinner recess, the class met at three to hear an afternoon lecture, which was occasionally followed by an extra lecture by some Professor who had desired an addition to his regular hours. And, as we have before intimated, two of the Professors gave gratuitous hours of instruction, during part or the whole of February, as we personally knew to be the case. But in the phrenzy of reform that has come over the professional mind, there has been a retrograde motion in this respect, most manifestly. In place of opening at nine, the schools have adopted ten as the starting point; and the lectures on some of the departments which were formerly given on every day of the week, save Sunday, have been, in nearly all the schools restricted to Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Who that can work a very simple problem in Euclid, can fail to discover in these *backward* reforms a positive loss, instead of the vaunted gain of which so much has been said? In view of the additions annually made to some of the departments of medical science, one would suppose, that at least as many lectures would be required, in order to give any thing like completeness to a course of six months, as were given in Transylvania University, in its palmiest days, with the oldfashioned sessions of four months. We sadly mistake, if in this respect, the advantage is not decidedly on the side of the old regime of the west.

We have thus, gentlemen, beguiled your time with desultory reflections on the *past* and the *present* of our profession. But, what of the *future*? Who can tell? Is its deterioration to keep pace with the swell of population, that is soon to cover the almost boundless territory of Oregon and California, whose cities, and towns, and villages, shall send forth scores and hundreds of the sons of all nations under Heaven, to fill the halls of medicine, that are destined to bestud the far off wilderness, over whose soil the proud flag of America shall wave, it may be, till time shall be no more? Or, will the present generation seize the golden opportunity of regenerating, dignifying, establishing on a basis, that shall bid defiance to corruption and decay, the venerable art of healing, and thus demonstrate that they are not degenerate sons of the immortal sires of the profession? I tell you, young gentlemen, the ~~selection~~ ^{solution} of the momentous problem is most intimately identified with your conduct and your destiny. If you form the iron resolve, inflexible as fate, to imitate the high and pure example of the great men, whose names have been uttered in your hearing to-night, by patient devotion to study in the time of your pupilage not only, but in after life amid the bustle and toil of professional duties, you will do well. Better still will you act your part, if you sternly refuse to take young men into your offices to study medicine, who are not well educated, of undoubted moral character, decidedly intelligent, conscientious, and obviously suited to the peculiar duties of the practitioner, determined that if unceasing vigilance in the oversight of their daily studies can avail, you will furnish the schools of medicine with no material that cannot be transformed into a very respectable physician. If you and all the pupils now congregated in the schools of America, will make this grand, noble, indispensable purpose, an abiding element of future life, carrying out with unwaning energy the doctrines herein set forth, the coming destiny of the profession will shine forth illustriously, pure and clear as the sun in his brightness, and the immortal lustre of the days of *Rush*, and *Physick*, and *Wistar*, once more glow on our horizon.

If our profession has waned, because of ignorance and disqualification, marked and palpable in the pupil, is it affirming too much to assert, that it has lost more by the lack of integrity, of pure, incorruptable honesty in some who boast of their Esculapian sonship? Let us all from this hour, resolve to do our duty, as if the entire issue hung on individual effort, under the solemn conviction that we are one day to account rigidly for the talent entrusted to our care.

"Ask you, what makes the true nobility?

Not wealth, nor name, nor tinsel pomp, nor power.

Fools have them all, and vicious men may be

The idols and the pageants of an hour.

But 'tis to have a true and honest heart,

Above all meanness and above all crime;

To act the right and honorable part

In every circumstance of place and time.

He who is thus, from God his patent takes,

His Maker formed him the true nobleman;

Whate'er is low and vicious he forsakes,

And acts on rectitude's eternal plan.

Things change, but changes touch not him,

The star that guides his path fails not, nor waxes dim."

UPHAM.